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A New Conservatism – As a Community-Building Ideology

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I. Introduction

In May this year, the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom made history by forming a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. Of course, given the indecisive election results that returned a hung parliament, the Conservatives' choice may be dismissed as that of political expediency. Yet to brush off the British Conservatives' handshake with their traditional rival as purely an act of desperation would be to miss the big picture.

For there has been a noticeable shift in the way political conservatism is debated, understood and practiced. David Cameron, since his rise to the UK Conservative party leadership in 2005, has taken every opportunity to reinvent his party from the old Thatcherism of the previous century. Ditching the traditional torch of freedom and hugging an oak tree is one such example, perhaps Cameron' symbolic answer to Tony Blair's Clause IV Moment¹.

Much of it, no doubt, has been shrewd re-branding for Cameron himself and his party. Nevertheless, there seems to be an important sense in which the recent developments have been a concerted campaign to reclaim the post-ideological political landscape, hitherto dominated by the 'Third Way' politics of the New Labour in the United Kingdom. Indeed, for those who study political ideas, there is something profoundly puzzling about a conservative party leader who speaks more about the quality of life and climate change than freedom and market economy, and sings from the same hymn sheet with a centre-left social liberal party.

The curious case of Britain, however, is just one illustration of an interesting insight of global relevance. Conservatism, one of the oldest of political ideologies, has been an indispensable part of political discourse in almost every nation across different political systems and contexts. What the British example shows is how conservatism needs constant readjustment and sometimes even radical redefinition to prevent it from degenerating into a merely reactionary opposition to any and every change.

This point is particularly relevant for young democracies such as South Korea where the short history of democracy makes it difficult for conservatives to see themselves as subscribing to an evolutionary, not a stationary, school of thought. Conservatism should not be misunderstood, as appears to be the case in Korea, as an anachronistic and dogmatic emphasis on security and free market economy. For too long, such confusions about conservatism have had unconstructive consequences on domestic politics as well as international policy matters.

Hence the primary objective of this paper is to contribute to the redefinition of conservatism for the twenty-first century. In particular, my thesis is that a new understanding of conservatism should place a restored emphasis on the notion of fraternity as respect and care for community. I would like to argue that such conception of the conservative ideology is capable of discussing the most critical challenges of the day in a pragmatic light.

My discussion comes in two parts. First, I offer a theoretical reinterpretation of conservatism as an ideology of fraternity. This is an attempt, albeit in brevity, to bring some lucidity to what conservatism stands to *conserve*; drawing from some of the common beliefs held by conservatives, I argue that fraternity is the proper desideratum of conservatism.

¹ In 2006, the Conservative Party replaced its traditional emblem of the 'torch of freedom' in blue with a green, scribbled-looking tree. In 1995, the Labour Party followed Tony Blair's recommendation to 'modernise' its policies and dropped abandoned the nationalising principles of the Clause IV of their party constitution – widely known as the moment the Old Labour became New Labour.

Second, I make tentative suggestions as to how a conservatism based on fraternity may address some of the most important challenges of our time. Briefly deliberating on topics such as social integration, sustainable growth, and national identity, my aim is not to proffer a political manifesto, but to demonstrate how a new language of conservatism may offer a more consensual and forward-looking framework.

I note that, throughout my discussion, I draw from British politics and relate to South Korean politics whenever appropriate. Yet my subject is conservatism as a community-building ideology of universal relevance.

II. What is conservatism?

- i -

Few, if any, political ideologies can boast doctrinal clarity. Yet the scope of ideas that share the name of conservatism is almost unrivalled in its breadth. It is hence often claimed that conservatism is the most intellectually modest of political ideologies, sometimes even denied the status of political ideology.²

A significant part of the problem is due to that different conservatives at different times stood for many, and often contradicting, values and institutions. In the United Kingdom, for instance, conservatism finds its genesis in Tory opposition to the Whigs and the French Revolution. Yet the values and principles articulated by Edmund Burke in the late eighteenth century – the modern *Conservatism* – were already radically different to the traditional institutions and ideals defended by the landed old Tories; for one, the abolition of the absolute monarchy marked a profound change in the political and social ‘traditions’ that the Conservatives sought to defend.

On the continental Europe, to the contrary, an almost authoritarian form of conservatism developed to oppose not only the mode but also the spirit of the French Revolution.

And on the other side of the Atlantic, it was not until the 1960s that conservatism began to be associated with major political parties in the USA. There, in a fundamentally liberal political system, American conservatism existed for long as distrust of federal government intervention.

In Asia, though many political movements developed to resist change and uphold national traditions, few presented themselves in explicitly conservative terms. That it is the *Liberal Democratic Party* in Japan that promotes business interests and traditional values points to the perplexing landscape of conservative politics; in the UK, Liberal Democrats identify themselves on the centre-left.

More recently, various libertarians have taken the conservative banner to promote the value of freedom. In particular, the Thatcher government in the UK (1979-90) and the Reagan Administration in the USA (1981-89) presented conservatism as a free-market ideology, bent on privatisation and dismantling of the welfare state. Adopting neo-liberal values into a conservative language, they were able to push their libertarian economic agenda against the backdrop of growing concerns about the post-war welfare state and economic management.

Thus the so-called ‘New Right’ thinking has since dominated the ideological agenda of many contemporary conservative political parties. The New Right proclaims a

² Noel O'Sullivan, *Conservatism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1976)

somewhat paradoxical mix of market individualism with social authoritarianism, envisaging a strong yet minimal state.

Many commentators, however, have argued that the New Right project does not properly belong in conservative ideology. Of course, conservatism is a broad church and many New Right thinkers also promote conservative values. Yet what must be made clear is that the New Right is at best a half-conservatism. It neglects or misinterprets the value of community that is so crucial to conservative ethos and instead over-emphasises a particular conception of freedom. In the US, for instance, it met with hawkish anti-Soviet sentiments to produce *neoconservative* foreign policies³; that many neocons preferred to call themselves 'paleoliberals' illustrates my point well⁴. And it is in response to this critique of conservatism-cum-libertarianism that I wish to offer a study of *mere conservatism*. A new philosophy of conservatism should address this liberal distortion and seek to establish its own creed.

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Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. The French revolutionary motto is not just some catchy slogan. Rather, I believe that the triad is the working rules of democracy which must operate in harmony for there to be a proper rule by the people⁵.

What is remarkable, then, is the almost complete neglect of the third component, *fraternity*, in modern political discourse. Whilst liberals have stood firmly to protect individual liberty and socialists have fought ferociously to achieve a greater degree of equality, few major political parties around the world have made fraternity their credo. Instead, fraternity or brotherhood has been only occasionally appealed to by various groups in order to 'fight together' for one ideal or another⁶; rarely, if ever, as the prize to be won in itself.

Indeed, some argued that *Fraternité* ill-fitted the triad as it belonged to a different conceptual level from the two preceding notions. Whereas *Liberté and Égalité* manifestly concerned the rights of the individual, they thought, a notion of brotherhood seemed out of place as it addressed the good of the community⁷.

However, I believe that it is precisely because of the individualistic reverberation of liberty and equality that a balancing emphasis on the whole is needed; the citizen must fight to earn and protect his freedom and equal status, yet he must never forget the *city* in which and from which he gains such rights⁸.

And this point is made clear if we review alternative concepts that were also used in triad with *Liberté and Égalité*: *Amité* (Friendship): *Charité* (Charity): or *Union*. These ideas, despite subtle difference in emphasis, all refer to the same spirit of fraternity, the care for the common whole. A sense of fraternity is what holds free and equal

³ Bruce Frohnen, Jeremy Beer, and Jeffrey O. Nelson, *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia*. (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006)

⁴ Michael Lind, "A Tragedy of Errors," *The Nation*, Feb 23, 2004.

⁵ Liberation from absolute monarchs and feudal system was often followed by a call for a more equal distribution of wealth, which in turn made demands on the liberty of those who had more to spend. Modern political discourse, accordingly, has been very much dominated by the discussion of liberty and equality.

⁶ In this sense, they appeal to "fraternité de rébellion" (Fraternity of Rebellion).

⁷ Mona Ozouf, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité stands for peace country and war", in *Lieux de Mémoire* (dir. Pierre Nora), tome III, Quarto Gallimard, 1997, pp.4353-4389 (in French): *Realms of Memory* (Columbia University Press, 1996-1998) (in English)

⁸ Also, it may be argued that there is a certain sense of ascent through the triad. Liberty cares for the natural individual's independence from external restrictions: equality concerns his relations with those around him: and fraternity addresses the relations between the individual and the whole which he and his fellow citizens make.

individuals together, and it is that bonding which sustains any political community. By neglecting it, we lose a crucial ingredient for a healthy republic.

My proposition, then, is that fraternity should be understood as the proper domain of conservatism. And by domain I have in mind something akin to what liberty is to liberalism or equality to socialism - the principal desideratum.

It is easy to say that conservatism is defined by the desire to conserve,⁹ but that says very little in itself if without a careful definition of what it desires to conserve. And I believe that neither free market economy nor any quaint old customs takes the pride of place in conservatism. Rather, it is the natural spirit of fraternity that brings human beings together into a political entity and that transforms them from mere individual creatures to the citizens of a republic. Conservatism stands against changes that are inimical to such spirit of common fate. In what follows, I hope to argue that conservatism should be read, or re-read, as an ideology which promotes *fraternity* as its principal value.

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Although the meaning of conservatism varies greatly depending on historical, political and social contexts, there is a set of central tenets articulated by a great number of conservative thinkers and shared by most conservatives. In particular, I consider the following to be fundamental insights of which conservatism is made: support for tradition: belief in human imperfection: organic conception of society: and acceptance of natural hierarchy.

Each of these beliefs has been subject to much philosophical investigation, yet I believe that to understand them in a more systematic way is a much-needed task for an ideology that has so often been declassified as an 'attitude of mind' by its critics and supporters alike. Here I offer my own interpretation of these elements of conservatism in order to argue that the conservative way of thinking inherently and properly relates to the idea of fraternity.

First, the conservative in principle stands to defend tradition against change. Tradition is used here as a widely encompassing notion including values, practices and institutions that have survived the test of time. It reflects a functionalist regard for the accumulated wisdom of the past which has worked and has been found to be of value.¹⁰ For instance, the Crown of the United Kingdom is defended by British conservatives for its functional merits, not because they still believe in the divine right of kings¹¹.

I believe, however, that the conservative defence of tradition has a deeper level of significance which relates to a community-oriented way of thinking society. Burke famously described society as "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."¹² This expansive notion of society points to a sense of a *continued* whole that different generations share. And it is this *intergenerational* common heritage that various traditions convey. In other words, the conservative seeks to protect tradition as a way of preserving that sense of common fate that our fathers lived, we live, and our sons will live.

⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: A Critical Edition*, ed. J. C. D. Clark, (Stanford University Press, 2001)

¹⁰ Andrew Heywood, *Political ideologies: an introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

¹¹ Theocentric justification for god-given customs and values is clearly no longer workable in modern democracy.

¹² Edmund Burke, *op. cit.*

Such commonality between and across generations is valued for creating a strong sense of identity for a community. Individuals, by belonging to that whole which transcends their own lifespan, derive a sense of identity as parts of something greater than themselves - as the *members of a community*. And by adding to their individual existence this sense of belonging, tradition contributes to forming the very basis of fraternity; one naturally cares for those with whom he shares the same fate.¹³ For the conservative, therefore, the ultimate objective is not so much tradition itself but rather an enforced sense of community membership aided by shared traditions.

Second, conservatism is a “philosophy of human imperfection.”¹⁴ It is an outlook of human nature which believes that human beings are both imperfect and imperfectible. Human beings are physically dependant on one another for survival because of their limited physical capacities, and in turn they are also psychologically dependent because of their physical need for community. Thus the fear of isolation and instability draws them to the safe and the familiar.¹⁵ Here, community should be valued as the ultimate source of the sense of security.

Yet we need not subscribe to the Hobbesian pessimism and go as far as claiming that the individual is the source of all moral imperfection or that base human instincts and appetites are inherently set against the common of good of the community.¹⁶ The preference for ‘tough’ criminal justice held by many conservatives, in so far as it stems from such belief, makes an unnecessary metaphysical commitment.

To the contrary, it is quite possible for the conservative to believe that, with adequate information and education, the desires of individuals can be confluent, each contributing to a collective striving for the common good. As much as the need for community rises from the imperfect human nature, so do natural social impulses such as love and care for one another¹⁷; it is precisely because we are imperfect that we must learn to support each other. And it is on such human instincts for sociality that the conservative should place an emphasis, as opposed to a crude, authoritarian conception of ‘law and order.’

Then, this insight links back to the conservative respect for tradition as things that which have *worked* to accommodate, foster and strengthen such sociable dispositions among citizens. For tradition helps us in that process of the enlightenment of the commons; our desires can be influenced by our conception of what is good for us. Furthermore, the conservative can embrace and even promote change if it is necessary for securing a social environment that is more conducive to such sociable dispositions.

Thirdly, the conservative rejects the contractarian view of society and instead sees it as an organic entity. Imperfect individuals belong to society not as parties to an unsigned social contract, but rather like body parts belong to the life of the body.¹⁸

Importantly, an organic conception of political association rejects mechanical accounts of liberty and equality. For instance, as articulated in Isaiah Berlin’s negative conception of liberty, freedom conceived solely as independence from the influence of others or the state runs the risk of over-emphasising individuality while neglecting the natural necessity of interdependence.¹⁹ Similarly, an intrinsic justification for egalitarian redistribution is likely to ignore the value of social dynamics among and between different groups in society.

¹³ Here I suggest something of an evolutionary psychological reading of altruism: Ruth A. Wallace & Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Expanding the Classical Tradition* (Prentice Hall, 2005)

¹⁴ Noel O’Sullivan, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Andrew Heywood, *Key concepts in politics*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000)

¹⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers and Karl Schuhmann (London: Continuum, 2005)

¹⁷ Andrew Heywood, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Such organic conception of society can be traced back to Plato’s theory of the Republic: Plato, *The Republic*. translated by G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992)

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, (Oxford, 2004)

Here, the Durkheimian notion of *anomie* should be a good point of reference in highlighting the atomising consequences of seeing society as a mere collection of individuals.²⁰ The conservative, instead, could put forward an account based on the willing acceptance of social obligations which naturally arise out of continued interaction between the members of community; no one should bowl alone²¹, but there need to be rules and compliance when people come to play together.

Again, this is where the New Right project stemming from classical liberalism fails to give a full picture of the social whole. The libertarian conservatives, motivated by political and economic incentives to scale back state responsibility, promote a notion of liberty that cannot properly be accommodated in the conservative perspective. I shall return to this point later.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially of all, the conservative embraces natural hierarchy in human society. He believes that, because each and every human being is different, various classes and groups in society have different roles²². And because different functions come in different levels of demand and supply, natural inequalities ensue; for instance, functions that are few in supply and in great demand rise in value. Hence those who are able to produce what is most needed for a joint project are sought with the greatest share of its fruit. The conservative therefore thinks that, to the extent that he believes that each human being is different, to try to equalise social gradations for its own sake is not only futile but also undesirable.

However, unlike the advocates of the New Right thinking, the conservative could take a step further from here. He can draw from his organic conception of society that individual merit is of little use when there is no joint project to contribute to. If one strong man cannot defeat beasts without the help of his weaker neighbours, he must see that it is actually in his interest to help those in need so that the neighbourhood may continue to provide a common shield for all. Thus the need to preserve and enrich the life of the common whole justifies and recommends a degree of redistributive amendment to the natural hierarchy.

Hence a conservative notion of 'fairness' accepts meritocratic hierarchy while remaining sensitive to the needs of those who struggle. On the one hand, this is clearly far from a cold, Darwinian class order in which the lucky few are left 'free' to get richer and richer; the libertarian conservatives' over-emphasis on the importance of individual liberty, yet again, is only half the picture. On the other, it avoids the luck egalitarian's trouble in distinguishing the effect of genuine merit from brute luck.²³ Instead of the Rawlsian contract which insures self-regarding individuals from bad luck²⁴, the conservative conception of fairness demands responsibility from the luckier members for the life of the organic whole.

Thus we have a form of conservatism which bases its ideological precepts on the value of fraternity. It defends tradition as a way of enforcing a sense of the common whole, points to human imperfection to highlight the need for community, envisages a social

²⁰ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide : a study in sociology*, Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Free Press, 1951)

²¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York; London: Simon & Schuster, 2000)

²² This requires no metaphysical claim about singular function/domain and merely claims that people do different things.

²³ Luck egalitarians, who believe that redistribution should be made to compensate for the effect of brute luck, have yet to offer a convincing standard by which luck can be distinguished from merit. Without it, even diligence and initiative may be attributed to good luck: G. A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice', *Ethics* (1989); Richard Arneson, 'Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare', *Philosophical Studies* (1989); Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (2000); Elizabeth S. Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?' *Ethics* (1999)

²⁴ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999)

entity which bears organic relations, and embraces social hierarchy without neglecting the need to care for the common fate of all.

Perhaps much resemblance can be drawn with Benjamin Disraeli's *one-nation conservatism* which sought to unite the rich and the poor not by equalising different groups but by emphasising the obligations of the rich.²⁵ It is telling that Disraeli, the founder of modern Conservative party, is remembered for extending the right to vote to the working class²⁶ and driving a number of social reforms.

Some may also say that this picture of conservatism is essentially communitarian in substance. And it is certainly true that my discussion so far has made rather little of freedom and private rights, and instead stressed duties and obligations as the operatives of an organic social entity.

However, an important point of distinction must be made here. Philosophical communitarianism carries a metaphysical claim that the whole is *more than* the sum of its individual parts. In particular, the Hegelian tradition claims that the community is *more real* than the individual and that the individual who does not fit in with the social norms or the law is *objectively* irrational. And we are only too familiar with how this insight was so easily abused for totalitarian intents.²⁷

In contrast, such metaphysical baggage is quite unnecessary to conservatism; in the words of Ian Gilmour, "the wise Conservative travels light."²⁸ The conservative supports neither the individual nor the community in principle, but instead recommends a working balance and harmony between the two. Indeed, he rejects a dichotomous conception of the relation between them, for he believes that it is symbiotic interdependence which binds the community and the individual; and he takes an *inherently* pragmatic approach in managing that relation.

And the conservative's pragmatism is an inherent one because it is the very foundation of his ideology. For the liberal or the socialist, pragmatism is a compromising move away from their chosen ideals. For the conservative, however, as recognition of the fact that the values of the community and the individual are interdependent, pragmatism *is* his ideal. The discussion above of conservative beliefs, I believe, reflects this insight in consistently grounding the value of the community in the human and *individual* need for it.

Hence the conservative clearly gives priority to fraternity as care for the common whole, yet it is not *over* other individual goods such as liberty and equality, but *through* them that he conceives the common good. Perhaps it could be said that he seeks to *moderate* those values for the well-being of the common life of individuals: too much liberty atomises the individual (*anomie*) while too little suffocates: too much equality oppresses the individual and too little is degrading. The key to sustaining the delicate fabric of society, then, lies in the art of pragmatic moderation.

²⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* (1845): *Coningsby* (1844).

²⁶ Second Reform Act of 1867

²⁷ "This state of mind, which subordinates the interests of the ego to the conservation of the community, is really the first premise of every truly human culture." Adolf Hiltner, *Mein Kampf*, Ralph Manheim translation. ch. 11

²⁸ Ian Gilmour, *Inside right : a study of Conservatism* (London : Hutchinson, 1977)

III. New Conservative Projects

Pragmatism guided by the value of fraternity is the essence of conservative that I have sketched thus far. What, then, does it say about some of the most important challenges that we face today? Of course, my discussion here neither aims at nor is capable of making detailed policy recommendations. Still, I hope that following suggestions may serve some use in showing how real policy issues may be discussed differently in a renewed language of conservatism based on building, protecting and enriching community.

First, the idea of 'compassionate conservatism' could gain real currency as a conservative answer to the questions of equity and social responsibility. Perhaps, under the account of fraternity-conservatism I have thus expounded, compassionate conservatism is a tautology; *conservatism*, as a systematic belief in the importance of the common whole, *must be* compassionate in actively tackling social evils that undermine the health of community.

Indeed, few conservatives would reject this sense of social responsibility. Even Margaret Thatcher, whose notorious comment that there is no such thing as society caused much controversy, was in fact aware of this:

"And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation²⁹."

In a fuller quotation, clearly, what Thatcher really meant to say was that "there *is* such a thing as society" but it is "just not the same thing as the state³⁰" and that people must bear their share of social responsibility. This insight is a remarkable advantage of compassionate *conservatism* over other ideological alternatives such as statist egalitarianism.

What is at stake, then, is whether compassionate conservatism can shed particular contextual elements that have, as in the case of Thatcher's unfortunate remarks, confined it to a dogmatic commitment to a libertarian economic agenda³¹. Society is not the same thing as the state, but neither is it the same as the absence of the state: for the health of community, state failure and market failure must both be addressed.

And in providing innovative and effective solutions, the compassionate conservative need not limit himself to the historian Doug Wead's idea of a 'bleeding heart conservative' who sincerely believes that free market system is better for the poor. Instead, the flexibility of a conservative policy approach should allow a wide range of options, be it government intervention, private sector initiative, third-sector activity or even a mixture of these. 'Welfare to work' in the UK, regardless of the extent of its success, could be a good point of reference here.

Second, conservatism can and should embrace the green agenda as a way of reconciling the critical need for future growth with the imminent environmental challenges. And, this requires a radical advance from the basic notion of conservation and protection that

²⁹ Margaret Thatcher, talking to Women's Own magazine, October 31 1987

³⁰ David Cameron, A speech delivered to the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England, 12 May 2008: italics mine.

³¹ Or, indeed, to a particular religion: compassionate conservatism in the United States has been closely associated with paternalistic Christianity and was used as George W. Bush's electoral slogan in 1999. Hence Paul Krugman thought it the "bone to the religious right.": Paul Krugman, Compassionate Conservatism, *The New York Times*, Jan 28, 2008

has long been the traditional remit of conservative concern for the environment; for such limited understanding of environment is prone to be sidelined by an equally limited idea of growth.

As traditionalist, the conservative believes that property is not merely the possession of the present generation; our land, air, water and other resources are passed down from earlier generations and will be passed down to coming generations. In that sense, environment can be conceived as another common heritage to be preserved in the spirit of the transcendent whole, imposing obligations and restrictions upon the present generation.

Furthermore, with an added insight that the ecosystem is natural capital, such obligations and restrictions need not be considered counter to the natural drive for growth. Just as we think it fair that those who employ various resources to create wealth pay for what they use, the conservative could justly make them pay for their use of natural capital. Also, by the same logic, we could establish grounds for social responsibility as a cost of social capital.

And again, in application, the conservatives should not confine themselves to the old rules of 'free-market' economy. The Quality of Life Policy Group, set up by David Cameron as the UK Conservatives' green think-tank, has recommended a new tax on workplace car-parking spaces, a halt to airport growth, and restrictions on car advertising. In short, business-friendly policy no longer means abolishing taxes and regulations; where necessary, the state can intervene to ensure the long-term prospect of our common business.

Lastly, the conservative could campaign for a renewed sense of national identity. What constitutes national identity of course would require much more discussion, but efforts to discover and promote the shared character of a community is an integral part of the community agenda; political system, industry, philosophy, language and culture are all parts of it. In Britain, the notions of 'Britishness' and the 'British way' are widely shared and spoken of: in the US, national symbols such as the Stars and Stripes are prominently used: what signifies the common spirit of Korean people, then, should be an important question for the Korean conservative.

The domestic benefits of a strong national identity are perhaps rather straightforward and I will not discuss them here. However, I believe that an emphasis on national identity may also have implications on international interaction on various levels.

For instance, the conservative could point to the virtual absence of policy frame on increasing immigration and resultant ethnic diversity in Korea. He may draw a lesson from European nations with longer history of immigration that are now struggling with ethnic tension and economic divide. Here, apart from arguing for controlled immigration, the conservative could favour a policy of assimilation; official language training and citizenship education for immigrants could be his policy programme.

On the issue of unification with North Korea, the above account of fraternity-conservatism may offer a much-needed escape from the confrontational stance of paleoconservatism. The Korean conservative, rather than simply adopting the American neoconservative's zeal for democratisation, may call for the restoration of the original Korean community. Here I hasten to add that this is neither support for the sun-shine policy nor rejection of firm policy on North Korea's military threats. Rather, what I want to point out is that the conservative need not see the issue of unification only as a triumph of democracy over a totalitarian regime; above and beyond the demands of security, there exists a human duty to cease the suffering of those who rightly belong to the native community of the Korean peninsula.

IV. Conclusion

Is there a place for conservatism in contemporary politics? Some may say that, in the fast-moving world driven by innovation, conservative loyalty to tradition is an anachronism. Others may find it difficult to identify with the libertarian conservative's hard-line economic agenda, while many are perhaps right to feel alienated from, if not threatened by, the hawkish rhetoric of paleocons.

My answer, however, is a resounding yes. I believe that conservatism, if properly understood in its uncorrupted spirit, is in fact more relevant today than it has ever been. For we spent too much of the twentieth century arguing about freedom and equality, and conservatives around the world have for too long confined themselves to the libertarian side of the Cold War. And if the Cold War and its aftermath have taught us anything, it is that what we must seek between liberty and equality is not so much a choice, but a working balance. The conservative must stop conflating community with free market democracy and resume his natural voice of pragmatism.

Yet his is not just any unprincipled pragmatism. Structured intellectual reflection on the value of community should give it a proper desideratum and guide its policy formulation. And much more needs to be said about our fraternal duty towards the common life. The words of the chief architect of New Labour Tony Blair, perhaps rather ironically, reflect upon this lesson with startling urgency and conviction: "A decent society is not based on rights; it is based on duty.... Our duty to one another...To all should be given opportunity; from all, responsibility demanded."³²

Regrettably, conservative parties and thinkers have been complacent in proffering a suitably modern equivalent of *noblesse oblige*. Instead of the somewhat outmoded notions of nobility or honour, the conservative should provide a new language of fraternity that may inspire a sense of duty – perhaps *société oblige* or *fraternité oblige*.

For Asian conservatives, then, this may present an invitation to serious introspection from which valuable and original insight may be gained. It was the Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair who presented the *Third Way* in the 1990s, but it is in fact an avenue that naturally belongs to conservatism, mapped out some sixty years before Blair as *the Middle Way* by Harold Macmillan who advocated the typically conservative pragmatism in what he called 'planned capitalism.'³³ The recent cinematic reincarnation of Confucius,³⁴ then, should serve as a reminder of the fact that the *Way* (Chinese: *dao*) of balance, community and duty had already been the subject of philosophical inquiry in Asia some two thousands years before Macmillan. Perhaps I go too far, but the potential of native virtues such as filial duty (Korean: *hyo*) or affection (Korean: *jung*) in the context of Asian collectivist heritage certainly merits serious study. What is most certain is that, as long as the Korean conservative speaks on his proper subject of community, he shall continue to have a great lot to offer in building the community of the twenty-first century.

³² Tony Blair, *Washington Post*, November 9, 1997

³³ Harold Macmillan, *The Middle Way* (London: Macmillan & Co, Ltd., 1938)

³⁴ *Confucius* (2010) directed by Hu Mei

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